The MAIDS of PARADISE

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SYNOPSIS.

Scarlett, an American soldier of fortune in the employ of the French Imperial Police at the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war, is ordered to arrest John Buckhurst, a leader of the Communists and suspected of having stolen the French crown jewels. While searching for Buckhurst, Scarlett is ordered to arrest Countess de Vassart and her group of socialists and escort them to the Belgian border. Scarlett finds Sylvia Elven of the Odeon disguised as a peasant and carries her to La Trappe where the countess and her friends are assembled. All are arrested. The countess saves Scarlett from a fatal fall from the roof of the house. He denounces Buckhurst as the leader of the Reds and the countess conducts him to where Buckhurst is secreted. German Uhlans descend on the place and Buckhurst escapes during the melee. Scarlett is wounded. He recovers consciousness in the countess' house at Morsbronn, where he is cared for by the countess. A fierce battle is fought in the streets between French and Prussian soldiers. Buckhurst professes repentence and returns the crown jewels to Scarlett. He declares he will give himself up to the authorities. Scarlett doubts his sincerity. Buckhurst urges the countess to go to Paradise. Buckhurst admits that he receives pay from the Prussians for information which he does not give. He secures passports to the French lines for Scarlett, the countess and himself. Scarlett reports to the secret service in Paris and finds Mornac, shadow of the emperor, in charge. He deposits the crown jewels and later, when making a detailed report, finds that pebbles have been substituted for the real stones. Speed, a comrade in the service, warns Scarlett that Mornac is dangerous. He also informs him that all the government treasure is being transported to the coast for shipment out of the country. Scarlett and Speed escape to join a circus. The circus arrives at Paradise. An order is received by the mayor calling the citizens to arms. Jacqueline, daughter of the Lizard, offers to join the circus to give exhibitions in the character of a mermaid. Scarlett makes friends with the Lizard. Scarlett calls on the countess at her home in Paradise. He finds Sylvia Elven also there. He learns the countess has withdrawn from the socialists. They swear eternal friendship. The Lizard learns for Scarlett, through one Tric-Trac, that Mornac is head of a communistic conspiracy.

CHAPTER XV.

Forewarned.

The lions had now begun to give me a great deal of trouble. Oh, they knew, and I knew, that matters had gone wrong with me; that I had, for a time, at least, lost the intangible something which I once possessed—that occult right to dominate.

That morning, as I left the training-cage—where among others, Kelly Eyre stood looking on—I suddenly remembered Sylvia Elven and her message to Eyre, which I had never delivered.

"My son," said I, politely, "do you think you have arrived at an age sufficiently mature to warrant my delivering to you a message from a pretty girl?"

"There's no harm in attempting it, my venerable friend," he replied, laughing.

"This is the message," I said: "On Sunday the book stores are closed in Paris."

"Who gave you that message, Scarlett?" he stammered.

He was so young, so manly, so unspoiled, and so red, that on an impulse I said: "Kelly, it was Mademoiselle Elven who sent you the message."

His face expressed troubled astonishment.

"Is that her name?" he asked.

"Well—it's one of them, anyway," I replied, beginning to feel troubled in my turn. "See here, Kelly, it's not my business, but you won't mind if I speak plainly, will you? I know Mademoiselle Elven—slightly. I am afraid of her—and I have not yet decided why. Don't talk to her."

"But—I don't know her," he said; "or, at least I don't know her by that name."

"Then who do you believe sent you that message, Kelly?"

His cheeks began to burn again, and he gave me an uncomfortable look. A silence, and he sat down in my dressing room, his boyish head buried in his hands. After a glance at him I began changing my training suit for riding clothes, whistling the while softly to myself.

"Mr. Scarlett I should like to tell you about myself; . . . I was a clerk in the consul's office in Paris when Monsieur Tissandier took a fancy to me, and I entered his balloon ateliers to learn to assist him. Then the government began to make much of us . . . you remember? We started experiments for the army. . . I was intensely interested, and . . . there was not much talk about secrecy then. . . . I made an invention—a little electric screw which steered a balloon . . . sometimes . . ."

He laughed, a mirthful laugh, and looked at me. All the color had gone from his face.

"There was a woman—" I turned partly towards him.

"I know," I said.

"Somehow we always talked about military balloons. And that evening . . . she was so interested in my work . . . I brought some little sketches I had made—"

"I understand," I said.

He looked at me miserably. "She was to return the sketches to me at Calman's—the fashionable book store, . . . next day. . . . I never thought that the next day was to be Sunday. . . . The book stores of Paris are not open on Sunday—but the war office is."

"I began to put on my coat.

"And the sketches were asked for?" I suggested—"and you naturally told what had become of them?"

"I refused to name her."

"So they sent you to a fortress?" I asked.

"To New Caledonia, . . . four years. . . . I was only twenty, Scarlett, . . . and ruined. . . . I joined Byram in Antwerp and risked the tour through France."

"You never saw her again?"

"I was under arrest on Sunday. I do not know. . . . I like to believe that she went to the book store on Monday, . . . that she made an innocent mistake, . . . but I never knew, Scarlett, . . . I never knew."

"Suppose you ask her?" I said.

His firm hand tightened on mine, then he walked away, steadily, head high. And I went out to saddle my horse for a canter across the moor to Point Paradise.

So, by strange ways and eccentric circles, like the aerial paths of homing sea-birds, I came at last to the spot I had set out for, consciously; yet it surprised me to find I had come there.

A boy took my horse; a servant in full Breton costume admitted me; the velvet humming of Sylvia Elven's spinning-wheel filled the silence, like the whirring of a great, soft moth imprisoned in a room.

The door swung open noiselessly; the whir of the wheel and the sound of the song filled the room for an instant, then was shut out as the Countess de Vassart closed the door and came forward to greet me.

"Are you troubled?" she asked, then colored at her own question.

"No, not troubled. Happiness is often edged with a shadow. I am content to be here."

Her face grew graver. "You must forget the past," she said; "you must forget all that was cruel and false and unhappy, . . . will you not?"

"Yes, madame."

"I, too," she said, "have much to forget and much to hope for; and you taught me how to forget and how to hope."

"I, madame?"

"Yes, . . . at La Trappe, at Morsbronn, and here. Look at me. Have I not changed?"

"Yes," I said, fascinated.

I picked up my gloves and riding-crop; as I rose she stood up in the dusk, looking straight at me.

"Will you come again?" she asked.

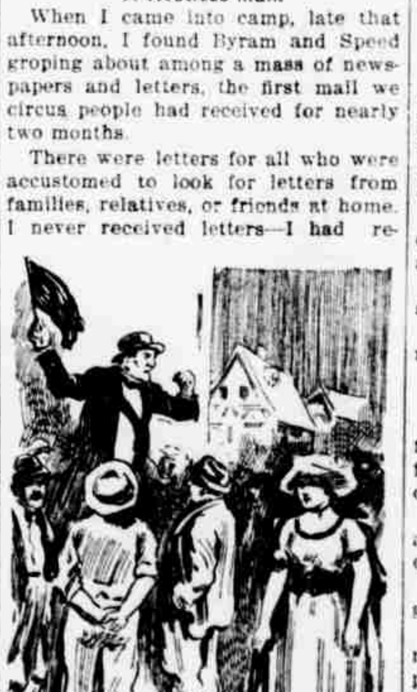
I stammered a promise and made my way blindly to the door which a servant threw open, flung myself astride my horse, and galloped out into the waste of moorland, seeing nothing, hearing nothing save the low roar of the sea, like the growl of restless lions.

CHAPTER XVI.

A Restless Man.

When I came into camp, late that afternoon, I found Byram and Speed groping about among a mass of newspapers and letters, the first mail we circus people had received for nearly two months.

There were letters for all who were accustomed to look for letters from families, relatives, or friends at home. I never received letters—I had received none of that kind in nearly a score of years.



The Man Was John Buckhurst.

But there were newspapers enough and to spare—French, English, American; and I sat down by my lion's cage and attempted to form some opinion of the state of affairs in France.

When, on the 3rd of September, the humiliating news arrived that the emperor was a prisoner and his army annihilated, the government, for the first time in its existence, acted with promptness and decision in a matter of importance. Secret orders were sent by couriers to the Bank of France, to the Louvre, and to the Invalides; and, that same night, train after train rushed out of Paris loaded with the battle flags from the Invalides, the most important pictures and antique sculptures from the Louvre, the greater part of the gold and silver from the Bank of France, and, last but by no means least, the crown and jewels of France.

These trains were dispatched to Brest, and at the same time a telegram was directed to the admiral commanding the French iron-clad fleet in the Baltic to send an armored cruiser to Brest with all haste possible, there to await further orders, but to be fully prepared in any event to take on board certain goods designated in cipher. This we knew in a general way, though Speed understood that Lorient was to be the port of departure.

The plan, then, was simple; but, for an equally simple reason, it miscarried in the following manner: On the 4th of September the treasure-laden trains had left Paris for Brest. On the 5th the Hirondelle steamed out towards the fleet with the news from Sedan and the orders for the detachment of a cruiser to receive the crown jewels. On the 6th the news and the orders were signaled to the flagship; but the God of battles unchained a tempest which countermanded the order and hurled the ironclads into outer darkness.

So, for days and days, the treasure-laden trains must have stood helpless in the station at Brest, awaiting the cruiser that did not come.

Speed and I already knew the secret orders sent. The treasures, including the crown diamonds, were to be stored in the citadel, and an armored cruiser was to lie off the arsenal with banked fires, ready to receive the treasures at the first signal and steam to the French fortified port of Saigon in Cochin China, by a course already determined.

Why on earth those orders had been changed so that the cruiser was to lie off Groix I could not imagine, unless some plot had been discovered in Lorient which had made it advisable to shift the location of the treasures for the third time.

Pondering there at the tent door, amid my heap of musty newspapers, I looked out into the late, gray afternoon and saw the maids and men of Paradise passing and repassing across the bridge.

A few moments later drums began to roll from the square. Speed, passing, called out to me that the conscripts were leaving for Lorient; so I walked down to the bridge, where the crowd had gathered and where a tall gendarme stood, his blue-and-white uniform distinct in the early evening light.

"Attention!" cried the officer, a slim, hectic lieutenant from Lorient.

The mayor handed him the rolls, and the lieutenant, facing the shuffling single rank, began to call off.

"Roux of Bannalec?"

"Here, monsieur—"

"Don't say, 'Here, monsieur!' Say, 'Present!' Now, Roux?"

"Present, monsieur—"

"Idiot! Kérdrec?"

"Present!"

"Garenne!"

There was silence.

"Robert Garenne!" repeated the officer, sharply. "'Monsieur the mayor has informed me that you are liable for military duty. If you are present, answer to your name or take consequences!"

The poacher, who had been lounging on the bridge, slouched slowly forward and touched his cap.

"I am organizing a franc corps," he said.

"You can explain that at Lorient," replied the lieutenant. "Fall in there!"

"But I—"

"Fall in!" repeated the lieutenant.

The poacher's visage became inflamed. He hesitated, looking around for an avenue of escape. Then he caught my disgusted eye.

"For the last time," said the lieutenant, coolly drawing his revolver, "I order you to fall in!"

The poacher backed into the straggling rank, glaring.

"Now," said the lieutenant, "you may go to your house and get your packet. If we have left when you return, follow and report at the arsenal in Lorient. Fall out! March!"

The poacher backed out to the rear of the rank, turned on his heel, and strode away towards the coast, clinched fists swinging by his side.

There were not many names on the roll, and the call was quickly finished. And now the infantry drummers raised their sticks high in the air, there was a sharp click, a crash, and the square echoed.

"March!" cried the officer. The crowd pressed on into the dusk. Far up the darkening road the white coiffes of the women glimmered; the drum-roll softened to a distant humming.

A shape slunk near me through the dusk, furtive, uncertain. "Lizard," I said, indifferently. He came up, my gun on his ragged shoulder.

"You go with your class?" I asked.

"No, I go to the forest," he said, hoarsely. "You shall hear from me."

I nodded.

"Are you content?" he demanded, lingering.

The creature wanted sympathy, though he did not know it. I gave him my hand and told him he was a brave man; and he went away, noiselessly, leaving me musing by the river wall.

After a long while—or it may only have been a few minutes—the square began to fill again with the first groups of women, children, and old men who had escorted the departing conscripts a little way on their march to Lorient.

Long tables were improvised in the square, piled up with bread, sardines, puddings, hams and cakes. Casks of cider, propped on skids, dotted the outskirts of the bowling-green.

I turned away across the bridge out into the dark road. Long before I came to the smoky, silent camp I heard the monotonous roaring of my lions, pacing their shadowy dens.

CHAPTER XVII.

The Circus.

A little after sunrise on the day set for our first performance, Speed sauntered into my dressing-room in excellent humor, saying that the country was unmistakably aroused to the importance of the Anti-Prussian Republican circus and the Flying Mermaid of Ker-Ys.

I had had an unpleasant hour's work with the lions, during which Marghouz, a beast hitherto lazy and docile, had attempted to creep behind me. Again I had betrayed irritation; again the lions saw it, understood it, and remembered. Poor devils! Who but I knew that they were right and I was wrong! Who but I understood what lack of freedom meant to the strong—meant to caged creatures, unrighteously deprived of liberty!

I mentioned something of this to Speed as I was putting on my coat to go out, but he only scowled at me, saying: "Your usefulness as a lion-tamer is ended, my friend; you are a fool to enter that cage again, and I'm going to tell Byram."

"Don't spoil the governor's pleasure now," I said, irritably. "I'm going to give it up soon, anyway—not now—not while the governor has a chance to make a little money; but soon—very soon. You are right; I can't control anything now—not even myself. I must give up my lions, after all."

"When?" said Speed.

"Soon—I don't know. I'm tired—really tired. I want to go home."

"Are you really going home, Scarlett?" he asked, curiously.

"I have nothing to keep me here, have I?"

"Not unless you choose to settle down and . . . marry."

After a moment's thought I said: "Speed, what the devil do you mean by that remark?"

"Oh, what do you imagine I mean?" he retorted. "Do you think I'm blind? Am I an ass, Scarlett? Be fair, am I?"

"No; not an ass," I said.

"Then let me alone—unless you want plain speaking instead of a bray."

"I do want it."

"Very well, my friend; then, at your respectful request, I beg to inform you that you are in love with Madame de Vassart—and have been for months."

"You are wrong," I said, steadily.

"No, Scarlett; I am right."

"You are wrong," I repeated.

"Don't say that again," he retorted. "If you do not know it, you ought to. Don't be unfair; don't be cowardly. Face it, man!"

"What are you saying, Speed?" I asked, rousing from my lethargy to shake his hand from my shoulder.

"The truth. In all these years of intimacy, familiarity has never bred contempt in me. I have watched you as a younger brother watches, lovingly, jealous yet proud of you, alert for a failing or a weakness which I never found—or, if I thought I found a flaw in you, knowing that it was but part of a character too strong, too generous for me to criticise. Listen to me, Scarlett. I tell you that a man shipwrecked on the world's outer rocks—if he does not perish—makes the better pilot afterwards."

"But . . . I perished, Speed."

"It is not true," he said, violently; "but you will if you don't steer a truer course than you have. Scarlett, answer me! Are you in love?"

"Yes," I said.

He waited, looked up at me, then dropped his hands in his pockets and turned away toward the interior of the tent where Jacqueline, having descended from the rigging, stood.

I walked fast across the moors, as though I had a destination. And I had; yet when I understood it I sheered off, only to turn again and stare fascinated in the direction of the object that frightened me.

Then, looking seaward, for the first time I noticed that the black cruiser was gone.

For a while I stood listening, searching the sea, until a voice hailed me, and I turned to find Kelly Eyre almost at my elbow.

"There is a man in the village haranguing the people." Speed thinks this man is Buckhurst."

"What!" I cried.

"There's something else, too," he said, soberly, and drew a telegram from his pocket.

I seized it, and studied the fluttering sheet:

"The governor of Lorient, on complaint of the mayor of Paradise, forbids the American exhibition, and orders the individual Byram to travel immediately to Lorient with his so-called circus, where a British steamship will transport the personnel, baggage, and animals to British territory. The mayor of Paradise will see that this order of expulsion is promptly executed.

"(Signed) BRETEUIL,
"Chief of Police."

"Where is that fool of a mayor? Come on, Kelly! Stay close beside me." And I set off at a swinging pace, down the hollow, out across the left bank of the little river, straight to the bridge, which we reached almost on a run.

"Look there!" cried my companion, as we came in sight of the square.

The square was packed with Breton peasants; near the fountain two cider barrels had been placed, a plank thrown across them, and on this plank stood a man holding a red flag.

The man was John Buckhurst.

When I came nearer I could see that he wore a red scarf across his breast; a little nearer and I could hear his passionless voice sounding; nearer still, I could distinguish every clear-cut word:

"Men of the sea, men of that ancient Armorica which, for a thousand years, has suffered serfdom, I come to you bearing no sword. You need none; you are free under this red flag I raise above you."

He lifted the banner, shaking out the red folds.

"Peace, Love, Equality! All this is yours for the asking. The commune will be proclaimed throughout France; Paris is aroused, Lyons is ready, Bordeaux watches, Marseilles waits!"

A low murmur rose from the people. Buckhurst swept the throng with colorless eyes.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

STRONG DEFENSE OF HER SEX

Miss Hulda Nutt Proves by Anecdote That Men Are Just as Foolish as the Women.

"It certainly does make me weary, all these innuendoes in the funny papers about the women. One would think by some of the supposedly facetious jokes that we girls didn't have enough intelligence to keep out of the home for the feeble minded," remarked Hulda Nutt to her sister, Ima, as she pointed to an illustration in the evening paper.

"Now here, for instance, is a rehashed story about a bridegroom carrying a basket, approaching a narrow creek. He turns to his simple minded bride—I judge she must have been simple or she never would have married him—and he offers to carry her across the stream. This egotistical male jokesmith has the bride make the inane reply: 'But you can't carry both me and the lunch basket. We would be too heavy. You carry me and I will carry the lunch basket.'

"As a matter of fact that foolish chestnut was first recorded about an old man with a basket of eggs and a commendably humane heart, who, as he boarded the street car, observed that the arched necks and cruelly docked tails of the two decrepit horses in front, bespoke a sadly contrasting prosperity in their remote youth. The old man's tender heart was touched at the pitiful sight, and as he took his seat in the car he gently lifted the basket of eggs out the window and held them there all the way of his journey to make the burden lighter for the poor horses. So you see, Ima," she added with an emphatic nod of her head, "the men are every bit as foolish as the women, if not more so."

China "Called" Livingstone.

It is not generally known that Livingstone originally had the intention of devoting himself to the work of "a pioneer of Christianity in China." It was as such that he offered himself to the London Missionary society in 1837, but when he had received his diploma from the faculty of physicians and surgeons in 1840, he found China closed to him, as Great Britain was then at war with the country. It was his meeting with Moffat, who had recently returned from South Africa, that led his steps to the Dark Continent.

Paw Knows Everything.

Willie—Paw, what is a piece de resistance?

Paw—A steak after your mother gets through frying it, my son.

Maw—You go to bed, Willie.

Living Up to Theory.

"He never spanks his son, does he?"

"No, he's an efficiency crank."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"He says the upward stroke is lost motion."—Houston Post.

A woman's face is her history—though few can read between the lines.